

Workshop Session – September 21, 2021

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, September 21, 2021, at 5:00 p.m. in the Graham County Community Building located at 196 Knight Street Robbinsville, NC for their regular workshop session. Board present Keith Eller, Lynn Cody, Jacob Nelms and Dale Wiggins. Board absent Connie Orr. Also, present Manager Jason Marino, Clerk Kim Crisp, Finance Officer Becky Garland, Health Director Larry Hembree, Health Director Beth Booth.

1. Vice-Chairman Eller called the meeting to order. Vice-Chairman Eller asks Manager Jason Marino to speak. Manager Marino stated that he had asked EMS Director Larry Hembree and Health Director Beth Booth to give the board a reporting on a possible field hospital.
2. Director Booth stated that the positivity rate is 9% currently which is a decline. Director Booth stated that we have had 357 positive cases in the last thirty days. Director Booth stated that there is another variant, but it has not been studied at this time in comparison with the delta variant. Director Booth stated that we are on the backside of the delta virus and hopes that the decline will continue.
3. EMS Director Larry Hembree stated that he has seen a decline as well in the number of EMS calls relating to COVID-19. Director Hembree stated that out of the last 32 calls, 3 of those were covid related. Director Hembree stated that we are continuing to see one to three hour waits at the hospital, but he has talked to the State, and they will not set up a field hospital at this time. Director Hembree stated that Clay County EMS has started the antibody treatment, but it took them almost three weeks to get enough antibodies to give 12 doses. Director Hembree stated that their plan was to give eight to nine doses per day, but they cannot get enough antibodies. Commissioner Nelms asks if the antibodies program would be coming to our county and Director Hembree stated that you had to train to administer the antibody and we do not have enough staff. Vice-Chairman Eller asks if we could partner with someone or even Clay County. Director Hembree stated that Clay County is giving antibody to residents only at this time. Commissioner Cody asks what time it takes to administer the antibody. Director Hembree stated that it takes one hour to receive the antibody and thirty minutes of monitoring. Commissioner Nelms asks if we could develop a plan that the State will respond to if we have another outbreak where all our hospitals are full. Director Hembree stated that the State said no at this time. Director Hembree stated that Clay County is administering the antibody from their Senior Center. Vice-Chairman Eller stated that if this next variant is as bad as the delta variant, we will need assistance from the State. Director Hembree stated that we are under the emergency plan that was adopted at the onset of covid, and Vice-Chairman Eller can initiate guidance with emergencies that may arise. Commissioner Wiggins stated that he would like more information on the program at Clay County.
4. Director Booth stated that the county would be required to have a host and she did ask Tina Lee with Appalachian Health Center to see if they would serve as the host, but they have limited staff as well. Commissioner Wiggins stated that we have room in the Urgent care facility. Commissioner Wiggins stated that we are a high-risk county, and we need a path forward. Director Booth stated that she did not believe a field hospital would benefit now. Vice-Chairman Eller stated that we needed a plan sooner and not later. Director Booth stated that we will see a trend if the new variant begins to rise. Commissioner Wiggins stated that we needed a plan in place where we can react within 48 hours. Manager Marino stated that we will be proactive and will send emails of updates as we move forward. Commissioner Cody asks that emails be sent weekly with the numbers of EMS calls related to covid so that they will know and be abreast of the situation to move quickly if needed. Director Booth stated that she updates every Tuesday on the health department site and will be glad to add the commissioners to the email. Commissioner Wiggins asks if we can put the request in now for a field hospital. Director Hembree stated that he can but right now the State is saying no. Vice-Chairman Eller asks if we need a new declaration and Director Hembree stated that we will be working under the original declaration. Commissioner Wiggins asks that Director Hembree lay the groundwork now if the next variant gets worse.
5. Vice-Chairman Eller asks for further discussion. No further discussion.
6. Vice-Chairman Eller asks for a motion to adjourn the workshop session. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to adjourn. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote unanimously.

Connie Orr, Chair - ABSENT

Keith Eller, Vice-Chairman


Lynn Cody, Member


Jacob Nelms, Member


Dale Wiggins, Member

ATTEST: 
Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board
